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The President's Radio Address

September 21, 1996

Good morning. I want to talk to you about two important breakthroughs for the health and security of our families that took place in Congress this week, as we work with both parties to agree on a budget for next year that reflects our values and keeps us moving toward a balanced budget.

Nothing is more important to our families than access to quality health care, and we have made real progress. Last year we stopped the Republican majority from repealing the guarantee of quality health care for children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Last month I signed the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill to guarantee Americans will not lose health coverage as they change jobs or just because a member of their family gets sick. When it comes to improving health care we are finally moving on the right track.

In my acceptance speech in Chicago and across America I have called upon Congress to take the next steps. And yesterday congressional leaders answered this call in two very important ways. First, Congress agreed to tell insurance companies, newborns and their mothers deserve at least 48 hours in the hospital after childbirth.

In 1970, the average length of stay for an uncomplicated delivery was 4 days. By 1992, it was 2 days. Today, a large and growing number of insurers refuse to pay for anything more than 24 hours, and some even recommend release as early as 8 hours after delivery. That's risky and wrong. And it can have severe health consequences for new babies, including feeding problems, dehydration, brain damage, and stroke.

We've all heard heartbreaking stories like the family in New Jersey sent home after 24 hours, whose baby died 24 hours after that from an infection that would have been detected and treated in a hospital. Doctors, not rigid insurance company rules, should decide when a new baby goes home.

This new legislation requires insurance companies to pay for new mothers and their babies to stay in the hospital for 48 hours, and 96 hours if the mother has had a cesarean. From now on, families may still rush to the hospital, but they won't be rushed out of it, because parents deserve at least 2 days of care and comfort when they can hold their child, bond with the child, introduce the child to the world, and make sure their child is in the very best health. America has a responsibility to protect the health of our families, and that's exactly what we're working to do.

Second, Congress agreed that it's time to ensure that people who need treatment for mental illness will get the treatment they need without discrimination. From now on, insurance companies will have to set the same limits for mental illness that they set for physical illness—no more double standards.

I've been with Tipper Gore for the past 2 days. She's one of our most effective advocates for the mentally ill. I know how much this means to her and to millions of other Americans who have dealt with this challenge in their own families.

I repeatedly urged Congress to take these steps, and now I urge them to finish their work as quickly as possible. When I have the bill to guarantee 48 hours in the hospital for new mothers and their babies, and to stop insurance discrimination against the mentally ill, I will sign it with enthusiasm.

Of course, we still have more to do. No child should ever be put at risk in America because a parent has lost his or her job and the health care that goes with it. We must make sure that people continue to have health care coverage when they're between jobs and looking for a new job. My balanced budget includes these reforms, along with expanded coverage under Medicare for mammograms and respite care for families who have Alzheimer's victims.

This week's agreement shows what we can accomplish when we set aside rigid agendas, put aside partisanship, and work together. Just a year ago Congress was consumed by bitter partisanship as the Republican majority sought deep cuts in Medicare, Medicaid,

education, and the environment that were unnecessary to balance the budget.

I vetoed their plan, and the American people supported my decision. So this year, in clear contrast, we are getting things done to help protect our children and our parents. And we're doing it even as we move toward a balanced budget. That's good for our families and good for our Nation.

When we recognize that we're all in it together, that no one should have to go it alone, there are things that we must do as a nation together, we are building our bridge to the 21st century.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:35 p.m. on September 20 at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 21.

Statement on Supplemental Disaster Assistance Funding for Victims of Hurricanes Fran and Hortense *September 21, 1996*

I have asked the Congress today for \$291 million in supplemental funding for fiscal 1996 to help the victims of Hurricanes Fran and Hortense, bringing total Federal assistance in response to those hurricanes to over \$1.5 billion.

About half of the \$1.5 billion will go to North Carolina, with the rest spread among South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and perhaps other States. The Federal Government will pay \$1.2 billion from existing funds, and I have requested that the Congress allocate the additional \$291 million within congressional spending limits.

Total Federal aid almost surely will exceed \$1.5 billion, however. These figures do not include all of the expected claims that will come in against the Federal crop and flood insurance programs, both of which have written substantial numbers of policies in the affected States.

I recently visited North Carolina, and I saw for myself the devastation brought by the two hurricanes as well as the related flooding. In addition, senior members of my administration have visited the region to learn more

about the problems that the hurricanes have brought in such areas as agriculture, housing, and public power.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other Federal agencies are doing what they can to help the victims. FEMA, for instance, has provided a full week of 100 percent financed, direct assistance in the form of equipment, supplies, and personnel to save lives and property, and it will continue to provide 100 percent financing for debris removal. It also has provided extensive individual and public assistance, helping tens of thousands of Americans. In addition, I have directed FEMA officials to continue to assess whether and when North Carolina will be eligible for 90/10 financing, that is, Federal financing of 90 percent of the costs, for eligible public assistance repair.

Other Federal agencies that are providing assistance include the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development; Small Business Administration; Army Corps of Engineers; Federal Highway Administration; General Services Administration; and Corporation for National and Community Service.

But we can and must do more. The \$291 million that I am requesting today includes funding for the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation as well as the Small Business Administration and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Specifically, the request includes:

Department of Agriculture, \$40 million—\$20 million for the Emergency Conservation Program to help farmers and ranchers whose farmland was damaged, and \$20 million for the Watershed and Flood Prevention to help communities reduce hazards to life and property;

Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, \$18 million—to enhance and improve infrastructure, such as water and sewer systems;

Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$110 million—\$100 million for Community Planning and Development and \$10 million for the Flexible